

This week President Bush made an appeal for immigration reform. He outlined several goals: securing our borders, offering a temporary worker program, imposing a penitential path to citizenship for illegals who already have deep roots here, and upholding our tradition as a melting pot nation that benefits from the renewed spirit of naturalized citizens. Those are great goals. They are difficult goals, but they outline a means of reform that honors our country and those of other nations who seek to join our company.

The United States is the greatest nation on earth. Throughout my life I have visited several foreign countries. They all have wonderful people, fascinating sights and great food. But there is no other country I'd rather live in than this one. With other Americans I'm proud of our freedoms and our democracy, and I support others who seek this way of life.

Still, life in the United States is not perfect. We are too absorbed with material things, too hesitant to feed the hungry in other parts of the world, too quick to violence, and too disrespectful of inconvenient human life. We are a great nation, but we could be better.

Three thousand years ago Israel felt the same way. Our responsorial psalm today includes this line: "In the sight of the nations the Lord has revealed his justice. He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel." So God was kind to his chosen people, and other nations then learned about God's justice. Our refrain is, "The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power." According to this particular psalm, God did not reveal his saving power in those nations, he revealed it in Israel, and the other nations saw it from afar. So just as we Americans think we are more special than anyone else on earth, the Israelites thought the same thing thousands of years ago. God was kind to Israel and others saw his justice.

This psalm shows up today because the first reading tells about Cornelius, a Gentile, not a Jew, who converts to Christianity. God was so anxious to help Cornelius become a Christian, that the Holy Spirit fell upon him just as the Spirit came to the apostles at Pentecost. This happened *before* Cornelius was baptized, while he was still learning about Jesus. The Jewish Christians there were astounded that the Holy Spirit came to a Gentile home. So the first Christians learned something that even this psalm hadn't completely foreseen. Sometimes God reveals salvation directly to other nations, and reveals to us that we have more in common with others than we thought, that we belong together.

Congress will debate immigration reform, and we hope and pray that it will bring together people who belong together. Meanwhile, we can pave the way in smaller ways, by getting to know new neighbors, by studying a foreign language, and by welcoming newcomers to our families and to our church. The Lord reveals his saving power all around us, and we are enriched when we see it and embrace it in others.